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Syria

Political, Social and Economic Factors/Alippo College/  
Altounyan Hospital, Aleppo/Near East Foundation Village  
Development Program

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Up to 52

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1. "Basically it is believed that the rigidity of the Syrian position springs from a deep sense of inferiority and frustration -- and this quite apart from the general lack of enthusiasm which all the Arab states share over Western policy which, in case of war, apparently contemplates manoeuvre through the area without regard to the wishes of the peoples or governments concerned and a scorched earth retreat if the region cannot be held. These feelings of frustration and inferiority arise rather from centuries of domination by others. They have been intensified by the disappointments and despair which have sprung from the actions and the unfulfilled promises of the Western powers over the past forty years.
2. "The hope of independence and untrammelled self-government which grew through the years of Ottoman domination seemed about to be realized at the close of World War, when it looked as if a great Arab state, or at least a federation of Arab states, was to arise. This was the Western promise; but it was not kept. Rather the area was divided up into spheres of influence, mandates were imposed, and independence was thus given and snatched away several times. Finally, only three years after gaining formal independence came the establishment of Israel through the direct intervention of the United States with the accompanying military and political defeat at Israel's hands.
3. "Moreover, it is a bitter thing to realize, as the Syrians must realize, that the times are out of joint; and that the present, as Professor Thomson of Harvard has so truly said, is a time in which the balance of power in the world is such as not to grant to small states the grace and luxury to live at peace between or among strong states and to be free to develop according to their own lights and free will. Rather it is an era of explosive ideas and expanding forces, 'Babylon versus Egypt again, Rome versus Persia, Alexander again, or Islam'. Therefore, willy nilly, small states must choose one side or the other and prepare themselves for the issue, or remain outside any system of defense, a fair and easy prey for either side. The Syrians know all this; but they fight against it.
4. "Thus we must take account of the ambivalence of the Syrian attitude toward foreign powers. They are determined and, at times, almost xenophobic nationalists -- Syria, after all, is the land of Queen Zenobia -- struggling for full and complete independence and the right, as it once was described, to tell everybody where to get

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off. At the same time they are realists enough -- as people of small states always must be -- to be forever on the look-out for that association with a larger power or group of powers that will most successfully promote their national interest and assure their future. These attitudes alternate in intensity and strength, but both are constantly present. This makes it difficult to say which is more basic, and to predict what the Syrians will do next.

5. "Apart from these characteristically Syrian attitudes, we must consider also the inner tensions which flow from the impact of the West upon the old order of Islam and the pastoral economy that Syria shares with other Arab countries. Finally, the rise of Israel and the fear and hatred with which it is viewed cannot be overlooked. Syria is on the firing line; and the slow accretion which is taking place as a result of Israeli expansion in defiance of the United Nations and the Tripartite Declaration, is chiefly at Syria's expense. Thus it is that the tensions centering around the state of Israel are a perpetual threat to the economic, cultural and psychological stability of the entire Arab world and in particular to Syria. Moreover, the connection of America with the existence of Israel is clear; and since the Syrian, like all other Arabs, thinks we are finally responsible, there is transferred to us the most deep-seated passion he has felt in many generations. Hence, Syrian resistance to all proposals for resettlement of the Palestine refugees and all offers of aid.
6. "However, there are factors in the political life of Syria such as a basic conservatism and respect for stability, an innate common sense, a general sense of direction and of what is wanted, as well as a small core of able and devoted men -- all of which offer promise for the future. Moreover, Syria is presently under a rather enlightened military dictatorship. To those who know the Syrian scene intimately, this is neither a surprising nor necessarily alarming development. For the plain fact is that Syrian nationalism has lacked cohesion and internal strength -- or the necessary patriotism, if you will. It has not found a basic unity because allegiance has always been to individual political leaders, each of whom has had a relatively small group of personal followers. Thus the struggle in Syria between the group in power and those out of power, has been more of a personal struggle than the conflict of party platforms and principles which we know -- or at least used to know, in our own country.
7. "Defeat at the hands of the Israelis came as a great shock to the Syrians. But in any event, Syria was ripe for any change which would give promise of a better day. People were not only tired of the old regime but anxious that the near anarchy which followed the fall of Jamil Mardam Bey's cabinet in the closing days of 1948, be ended. It was ended on March 30th, 1949 by Colonel Husni Zaim who later was shot. He was succeeded by Colonel Hinnai and thereafter by the present leader, Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, who took over at the close of last year. This was immediately after an anti-western government had been formed, headed by a civilian, one Dr. Maruf Damalabi, and pointedly excluding the military. The reason for this rapid turnover had primarily to do with the question of union with Iraq and need not detain us here.
8. "The point to observe is that a strong hand has been needed in Syria if it was not to fall into anarchy; and that this hand has been supplied. Moreover, it is equally pertinent to observe that the successive military leaders have promulgated revolutionary social programs. Thus Zaim with all his faults maintained during his regime a high standard of public security and order which he demonstrated could be enforced and which had public approval. That security persists today. Moreover, he made specific moves to separate church and state and to limit the powers of the religious hierarchy. He also restricted the authority of the Muslim religious law by the substitution of a civil code. Finally, he gave women a limited right to vote (limited only by literacy) -- a radical step in a Moslem country.
9. "Colonel Shishakli has gone further, issuing decrees providing for land reforms which limit the size of new land holdings and provide for the reversion of unused lands to the state. Recent decrees have also provided for an "inheritance and legacies"

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tax on immovables as well as movables which alone were formerly taxed; the taxation of real property has been increased with graduated rates, and the reporting and administrative machinery tightened and improved; irrigation taxes have been reformed to cover maintenance expenses of existing public systems as well as to compensate for initial expenses to the state and make agriculturalists pay something in return for the benefits provided and for the considerable rises in land values resulting therefrom. The state is thus on the way to remedying the chief defect of the Syrian fiscal system, namely, the absence of any balance between direct and indirect taxation, revenue formerly being derived mainly from indirect taxes and fees of a regressive nature -- a practice the present government states is 'opposed to principles of social justice'.

10. "The government has set up a Consultative Health Board drawn from its chief health specialists and leading doctors, to advise on programs and legislation. In the name of social justice, all honorary titles of distinction have been abolished because 'they had become degenerate and cheap as well as quite meaningless and of no value, and their continued use reflected our (Syrian) inability to rid ourselves of the evils of the past.' Price controls have been established and decrees issued designed to improve the working conditions of laborers. On 10 June, a new Syrian Cabinet was appointed by the Chief of State and Premier, who also took the Defense and Interior portfolios. Some political observers in Damascus believe this is a definite step toward the restoration of democratic parliamentary life as promised earlier by the Army.
11. "Most of these new laws are revolutionary indeed in Arab society; and if they or some of them can be implemented, Syria, which has floundered so long, will have a bright future. It has extensive lands for agricultural expansion and great areas such as the Ghab and Rudj marshes which can be reclaimed through draining. Even larger areas can be made to bloom with irrigation and the conservation and full utilization of its water reserves. Thus though there are approximately five million seven hundred thousand acres now in cultivation in Syria, there are at least another eight and a half million cultivatable acres available or approximately 1.5 times the area now in cultivation.
12. "We do not wish to give the impression that all is beer and skittles with the present government of Syria. It is a dictatorship dominated by the military with a general, Fawzi Selo, as Chief of State, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense as well as Interior, and with Colonel Shishekli as the power behind the scenes. In addition to the truly revolutionary and progressive decrees referred to above, the Government has also issued decrees abolishing political parties, controlling the press, and prohibiting all university students as well as students of public and private schools from joining any political party or group or engaging in political activity or participating in strikes or other unauthorized demonstrations -- a measure, however, which in view of the experiences of Egypt where the universities, with the encouragement of the Wafd, became centers of political rather than educational activity, is perhaps not unwise.
13. "The Syrian government has also forbidden the establishment of any new foreign private schools and has laid down rather strict but not illiberal rules to be observed by the private Syrian schools. However, the decree effecting these changes allows existing foreign schools to continue to operate subject to the rules and regulations of the decree which affects all private schools, foreign or national, any of which could be closed if the State so decreed. Prohibited also are contacts on the part of government officials with foreigners and the dissemination of foreign propaganda -- this latter being a reaction, of course, against the heavy cumulative volume of pressure being exerted upon Syria not only by the Western powers, but also by Israel, Turkey and by such neighboring Arab states as Egypt and Saudi Arabia as well as, indirectly, by Russia.
14. "Yet with all this, the Syrian decrees and the attitudes of the Syrian military leaders as well as the form and language of their pronouncements, are curiously like those of Ataturk in the early days of his dictatorship in Turkey; and it is not too

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much to conjecture that the example of Ataturk is foremost in the mind of Colonel Shishakli. Indeed, we were struck with the similarity even in language with some of the recent pronouncements of General Selu. Witness the opening paragraph of the 'First Statement on Achievements of Syria's Government of the New Regime during Three Months in Office (December 1951 - March 1952)' --

**'Vigilant People!**

**'Ever since the commencement of the era of independence, we voluntarily and by our own choice swore before God and men to keep the following oath and to accept its terms as the guide and motto of all our actions:**

**'I swear by Almighty God to place my person and my talents at the service of the Syrian Motherland, to defend it and protect its flag, to maintain the independence of my country and the safety of its territories, to preserve my honour and obey my superior officers in all the aforementioned obligations and to shed my blood in the discharge of my duty; so help me God.'**

15. "Therefore, while one cannot say what is going to happen in Syria, there is a good chance, at least, that the present Syrian experiment, which is being closely watched in the West as well as in the Middle East, may be both significant and encouraging for the entire area. Indeed, it is our belief that the political as well as the economic promise of Syria is very real and may well have a decisive influence in the Middle East. It all depends upon whether or not the Western powers (and Russia) will leave the evolution of the Syrian government in the hands of the Syrians themselves long enough to allow them to realize their own capabilities and thus their dream of an independent republic.
16. "So much for the psychological and political scene. The economic story of Syria is not much different from those of the other countries covered by this report and so far as it is different, it is all to the good. The expansive and absorptive capacity of Syria is limited so far as industry is concerned, but relatively unlimited so far as agriculture is concerned. Since Syria is predominantly an agricultural country, -- between 60 and 70 percent of its people being directly dependent upon agriculture for a living and almost 10 percent of the remainder being engaged in the processing and trading of agricultural products -- its culture is dominated by the agricultural way of life, as exemplified by the village folk and particularly in Syria, as in Saudi Arabia, by tribal groups.
17. "The tribes of Syria constitute an important segment of the agricultural or rural population numbering almost a half million of a total population of slightly over three and a quarter millions. They exist in various stages of settlement, from purely pastoral nomadism to almost completely settled agriculture. They are farmers in their own way and in their own right although they are not usually considered or officially classified as such. But it is they who harvest the scanty desert grass with their roving flocks of sheep and goats and herds of camel and cattle, raising the bulk of the country's livestock and producing most of its meat, wool and dairy products. From the overflow of their population they have contributed over the centuries to the rise of village and urban settlements and through their tribal way of life to the general culture of the country.
18. "The larger and more important segment of the population, however, is made up of village folk who total over a million and a half. They are the cultivators of the soil, whether they own it or work on it as tenants or laborers, who produce most of the crops and raise part of the livestock of the country. They live in nuclear villages from which they go forth into the surrounding fields as the crops are to be sown and reaped.
19. "Finally, there are two other segments of the population directly engaged in agriculture. These consist of a large number of city-dwellers in the towns of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Hama, as well as the smaller towns, who are farm laborers, tenants,

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operator-owners, absentee landlords, so that most of the towns classified as urban are really predominantly agricultural in character. The smallest and newest segment of the agricultural life of Syria are the progressive land owners who -- with up-to-date methods of cultivation and harvesting with tractors and combines and with extensive irrigation works -- are growing and disposing of large crops of grain and cotton.

20. "Though this be but a small segment, the impact of this group upon the traditional life of Syria is bound to grow. The important thing which this brief analysis of the agricultural population of Syria shows, however, is that any program of agricultural development and rural welfare must center in the villages, working ultimately with the tribal groups also and to a certain extent with the fairly large segment of urban people who are closely tied to agriculture.
21. "In the social sphere, the story in Syria is a familiar one, for there are the same lacks and the same needs as elsewhere in the area. The basic services of community life plus enlightened social leadership are needed. So also are improvement of agricultural methods and planning, in village and urban schools, in sanitation and public health including nurses' training, in mechanical and managerial skills, in the supply of agricultural credit which for the small land owner or farmer is non-existent. Teachers and nurses are badly needed as are doctors and medical care.
22. Aleppo College: Still a vigorous and comparatively young man, though he has 37 years of Near East experience behind him, Alford Carleton, president of Aleppo College, is the elder statesman of American educational work throughout the region. He is in constant demand as an adviser from Egypt to Greece and Turkey, and from Lebanon to Iran. His knowledge of the area and its people is phenomenal. He has been offered important positions, in the United States or in the Near East, carrying salaries many times the missionary stipend that keeps him at Aleppo. His disinterested and intelligent devotion to the interests of the Arab people makes him a trusted adviser, and in this capacity he is a bulwark of all that is best in American influence throughout the Near East.
23. "The institution can stand on its merits. This, after all, is only to be expected with such a man at its head. Aleppo is an ancient and populous city. Commercially it rivals Damascus. It is set in a fertile region of considerable extent, giving upon the well-watered coast. Much of the future development of Syria will depend upon the progress made in this rich northwest corner of the country. There will be a growing demand for the services which the college can render.
24. "The college occupies a unique position in Aleppo and indeed in the whole of Syria. The university in Damascus is of doubtful quality and modeled on the French system of instruction. Damascus College, which is a branch of the American University at Beirut, has not taken root and may possibly be closed. Aleppo College is growing, indeed it has outgrown its buildings and staff. And it is steadily increasing its collegiate and diminishing its secondary enrollment.
25. "Like all the American institutions in the Near East, it is faced with rising costs just when its financial support in the US is weakening. Too heavy a burden is therefore thrown on the fee income. What the college has done and continues to do with a minimum budget is a miracle of efficiency, sacrifice and devotion on the part of the small and overburdened faculty. President Carleton spoke first of his desire to deal more adequately with the agricultural education of his pupils who are the sons of land owners; but under cross-examination he confessed that the real need of the college was for a fund that he could use for salary increases, new staff appointments, the beginnings of a pension fund and some long overdue equipment. A hundred thousand plus dollars spent in this way to strengthen an invaluable institution will bring greater returns in leadership and the extension of the best kind of American democratic and spiritual influence than a million dollars worth of projects devised for specific purposes.
26. "At a time when American prestige is at its lowest ebb in the Near East, these liberal arts colleges with a missionary background of unselfish service are almost

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the only generators of goodwill to the US. This is particularly true in Syria where hostility to the US is kept fresh by constant incidents on the Israeli border. Aleppo College and its president are the best ambassadors we have in Syria. It would be a great pity to let their influence wither for lack of the small amount needed to maintain their faculties. No expenditures could win back the goodwill that would be lost if they were to disappear from the Syrian scene. They will not disappear as long as there is the barest minimum of financial support to enable them to survive; but the modest grant we recommend will not only give them fresh heart, it will enable them to multiply their influence many fold. No one who has seen Aleppo College in action would be likely to disagree with this.

27. "Altounyan Hospital, Aleppo: In Aleppo is another extraordinary person and pioneer, Dr. Ernest Altounyan, O.B.E., M.C., M.D., F.R.C.S., F.I.C.S., the director and chief surgeon of the hospital who received his medical training at Cambridge and the Middlesex Hospital, London. He served in the British Army during both World Wars. He is to be joined shortly by his son, Roger Altounyan, who is completing his medical studies in London, having served as a pilot in the Royal Air Force during the last war when he was awarded the Air Force Cross.
28. "The Altounyan Hospital was founded in 1908 by the late Dr. Assadour Altounyan who was born in Sivas, Turkey, and educated at the American Mission College of Aintab (now Aleppo College), from where he was sent on a scholarship to Columbia University in New York, returning to Aintab as professor, after further studies in Europe. In 1889, the college was forced to close, so with his Irish missionary wife, he settled in Aleppo where he started the hospital and continued to work until his death in January 1950 at the age of 93.
29. "The hospital has earned a high reputation for its pioneer work in medicine and surgery. It is one of the few Medical Centers in the Middle East which has the necessary trained staff and equipment with which to undertake modern methods of treatment. Its services are available to rich and poor alike, regardless of race or religion. There are at present 50 beds. The out-patient departments form a large part of the work of the hospital, where free clinics and diagnostic procedures are also available to the poor. The Radiotherapy Department, in addition to treating cancer, is used for the treatment of 2000 cases of Ring Horn each year.
30. "Attached to the hospital is the only nursing school in North Syria and one of the few in the Middle East which attempts to carry out the systematic training of nurses. It was founded 25 years ago and is directed by an English Sister Tutor. It has an average of 30 students in training over a four-year course. These students come from Armenian families and orphanages in Syria and Lebanon. Graduates of the nursing school are employed by hospitals throughout the Middle East.
31. "Very impressive are the physical plant, the efficiency and the esprit de corps of the staff of the hospital. Striking are the discipline, the high standards and equipment, and the obvious and exceptional competence of its director. Also impressive is his daughter who directs the administration of the hospital.
32. "Since Syria became an independent state, the government has been faced with the problem of organizing efficient state hospitals. The functioning of these hospitals depends on a well-regulated nursing service. It is not only essential, therefore, to seek to overcome the traditional Moslem prejudice against nursing, but also to provide training for nurses. Syria at present has no such center.
33. "It is not enough, as is sometimes done, to send girls from Syria to train in England if progress in this field is to be made. It is not the isolated British-trained nurse who is most required at present, but the essential foundations of a nursing service, firmly established and understood by the authorities and the public, which will encourage girls to take up nursing as a profession and make it possible for those sent to England to come back to work in an organization not too far removed from that in which they were trained. It is therefore most important to have on the spot a Medical Center and nursing school run on Western lines, which will not only

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turn out trained nurses, for whom there is an increasing demand, but which will also serve as an example to the country which has not had the time or the experience to develop a nursing service of its own. The Altounyan Hospital is such a place; and the hospital's up-to-date equipment and the high standard of work maintained, afford the student nurses ample opportunities of practicing modern methods of nursing in the wards.

34. "Thus it is that the nursing school can play a very important role in the establishment of a nursing service in Syria, by setting up standards of nursing and of living and working conditions for nurses, as well as providing well-trained nurses to help staff the many hospitals the government plans to open throughout the country. The school is able to train more nurses each year than are needed by the hospital itself. Dr. Altounyan, who is particularly interested in the teaching of doctors and nurses, is only too anxious to cooperate with the government in any scheme and to advise on medical matters. Thus during the past five years great efforts have been made in the nursing school to raise the general standard in spite of the lack of special funds for the purpose.
35. "Recent developments in the relations of the hospital with the government show that the Ministry of Health welcomes the hospital's cooperation. The Director of Health in Aleppo has offered the posts of matron and four staff nurses to new graduates of the school, thus unofficially recognizing the diploma given by the hospital. He has also put the matter of the recognition of the diploma up to the Ministry of Health and it has been decided that the graduate nurses will sit for a government examination, after which the hospital diploma will be given the official government stamp. In view of these developments, the hospital plans to encourage more Arab students to attend the school and to arrange for the non-Arab student nurses to have a four year course of Arabic lessons so as to overcome the language difficulty which would handicap them when employed in any government hospital.
36. The hospital has no endowment and is not supported by any subventions from the state. The fact is that Dr. Altounyan is using his own now meagre funds and the money he receives from patients able to pay proper fees, to keep the hospital and the nurses training school going. Costs of the medical treatment are increasing in Syria as elsewhere; and this self-contained unit, far from any larger fully-equipped hospital on which it could rely for help, is finding it difficult to make ends meet. The nursing school in particular has become a heavy burden on the hospital's budget.
37. "Near East Foundation Village Development Program in Syria: It is assumed that the basic tenet of the Near East Foundation - 'Help the People Help Themselves' is well known and that equally familiar is the fact that the key is education, largely of the non-institutional type, primarily in the form of extension work and demonstrations.
38. "The Near East Foundation is now working in Syria at the government's request and in cooperation with the government. Actually the policy of the Near East Foundation is to work only in the field of rural improvement -- which seems sound as approximately 80 percent of the Near East countries are rural and dependent on agriculture for a livelihood. The primary efforts of the foundation are devoted to raising the productivity of the farmer by teaching improved agricultural practices; but an essential adjunct of such a program is to teach the farmer practices that will improve a health conditions, to give instruction in home economics and to instill a sense of community responsibility.
39. "The Near East Foundation has been engaged in a limited program in Syria since the fall of 1946, but the tense and confused political situation has been such that it has not made the progress favorable. In the period 1946-1949, however, the foundation gave a rather spectacular demonstration of what could be done in health measures, by reducing the incidence of malaria in an area occupied by 35 villages with approximately 10,500 inhabitants, from 83 percent to 6 percent! As a result, the Syrian government offered help for an enlargement of this malaria control program which was commenced but soon restricted due to changes in the government and lack of funds on both sides.

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40. "In May 1951, the Near East Foundation received a Point IV grant of \$87,000 and immediately expanded its activities; but in February 1952, the Point IV contract was cancelled on the ground that Syria had not signed an NEA agreement with the US and therefore could not receive its aid. This created an emergency which the foundation has met in the only way possible, namely, by cutting back its program. The cancellation of the agreement was followed by the enactment of legislation which could have barred the Near East Foundation from any further activities in Syria, and, in fact, an order was actually issued to this effect due chiefly to the hostility of the then Minister of Agriculture who has since been removed. There can be little doubt but that the position of the Near East Foundation was hurt by this episode, for retractions never catch up with accusations. But from all we could learn, it now has the personal assurances of Colonel Shisheki that it is wanted, that its work is appreciated, and that it may continue."

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